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ABSTRACT

As part of the activities establishing the National Institute of Education, a Planning Unit evolved to obtain advice from experts on the objectives, activities, and organizational structure of the new organization. The Planning Unit studies include this paper which traces the nature and evolution of Federal program development in education beginning with the Great Society programs. The general impact and evaluation of these programs are analyzed. Two possible conclusions based upon these experiences--that local implementation fails because of inadequate resources or deficient techniques for transfer--are applied to a proposal for a new style of development. A three phase model of program development, occurring over a longer time period, is outlined which would be based in research, focusing on engineering aspects such as training techniques, technical assistance and materials for use by local personnel; that would experiment with mechanisms for training and with dissemination of program models using highly skilled staff; and that would approach as closely as possible a typical operation program with minimum use of the program design. Capabilities required by this proposed concept of program development are intended to meet the need to carry on lengthy program efforts and to provide long range planning. (Author/KSM)

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June 16, 1972

TOWARDS THE PRACTICE OF PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

I have been asked to put down a few words on the nature of program development and trace the evolution of our thinking about this notion. Let me begin by recounting a bit of not too well authenticated history which may help to put my interest in program development into some prospective.

The efforts initiated when the Poverty Program and other Great Society programs began were supposed to have been based upon research but in reality were not. The Head Start program was preceded by a few research and demonstration programs but there was little solid evidence concerning their effectiveness. The Community Action Program was, of course, presaged by the "grey area" and the juvenile delinquency programs funded by the Ford Foundation and HEW in the early 60's. The manpower programs seem more likely to have originated as part of these grey area programs or as part of the Area Redevelopment Act, which focussed on un- and under-employment in West Virginia and Appalachia generally. These programs were enlarged at an extraordinarily rapid rate. As a consequence, the best that could be done was to provide rather broad and superficial guidelines and instructions to practitioners in the field.

A concomitant of the growth of Great Society programs was the growth of staff offices dealing with planning and evaluation. As a consequence these new social initiatives were subjected to various sorts of evaluations at both the local and national levels earlier

in their history than is the case with most government programs. These evaluations were depressingly consistent in their findings. The impact of these programs seemed much lower than desired. The Head Start program seemed not to provide a cognitive head start, although it may well have been the vehicle for obtaining better health care and social services for disadvantaged children. The Community Action Programs do not seem to have significantly redirected public resources towards the problems of the poor, although they provide employment for many and for a mechanism by which the poor can assert their concerns more effectively. And, compensatory education programs seem generally to be less than effective, with youngsters continuing to fail to achieve levels that have come to be viewed as the norms within society.

The problem with most evaluations is that they cannot give us very much of a clue as to why the programs have failed. It could have been that program operations, particularly when they were initiated under the hustle and bustle of the mid 60's simply did not incorporate the practices suggested by the fragments of research that existed. The compensatory programs' curricula may have been used badly. The Head Start program may have not reflected the intent of its developers.

Alternatively, the early program developers may not have used the appropriate theories. We may not have known what points of intervention were really appropriate. We surely do not know to what degree manpower programs fail because they are administered poorly or because they attack the wrong part of the problem, notably the

institutions of the labor market. Evaluations do not tell us this because they were too crude. They have looked only at outcomes. And, they couldn't have done a great deal more because all of the multitude of factors affecting the outcome of social programs are confounded in normal operations so that it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate the causes of program success or failure.

I suspect that the general public has interpreted the evaluations' negative findings to mean that the types of treatment that have been used are not effective in dealing with poverty problems. Experts have not been quite so willing to do so, perhaps because they have a good deal of self-interest involved. They have argued that the programs that were evaluated did not adequately reflect the theories on which they were based, and that what was basically required was an improvement in the quality of these programs' operation. In order to test this, several major quasi-experimental, activities have been undertaken. The first was the Follow-Through program, followed by Planned-Variations experiment in the Head Start program. Another program, also called Planned-Variations, has been carried out in Model Cities and a few similar attempts have been made in compensatory education. The preliminary results from Follow-Through and Head Start also are not encouraging. Not only does there seem to be relatively little difference between the program types but there also seems to be relatively little difference in the relative status of persons participating in a program and those not receiving its services. This discouraging finding could well lead to the conclusion

that programs themselves are not productive and that perhaps the problem lies with the institutions into which they are thrust. For example, the labor market or normal elementary or secondary schools.

Recently I have had some enlightening discussions with people who have developed programs that were subsequently incorporated into one of these Planned-Variations experiments. They argue that even after only two and three years in the Follow-Through and Head Start, the experimental projects within the schools no longer reflect the type of program as initially conceived. This is important because, in at least a few instances, the initial research indicated that disadvantaged children gained significantly in competences that the program was designed to improve and these competences were sustained into the elementary school years by a substantial proportion of the program participants into the elementary school years. The contrast between the initially hopeful research and the actual experience of the Planned-Variations effort leads to one or two possible conclusions. One is that when programs are implemented in the local environment with the types of resources available there, they simply cannot come close enough to the original model to be effective. In other words, the original research program depended upon the highly trained competences of the researchers or the motivations of those involved in such research and that these competences and motivations are not consistently available on the local level. Alternatively, it is possible that the means for transferring the techniques and approaches inherent in research programs to the local operational program were

seriously deficient. If these deficiencies were remedied, it is possible that local people could in fact operate programs that can improve the functioning of youngsters and sustain these improvements through time. If this latter explanation is correct, then the Planned-Variations program may have failed really because it actually tested alternative models which had not been adequately transferred into operation.

It is perhaps too early to determine whether or not this explanation of the failure of various types of intervention programs is an appropriate one, but it is surely worth paying more attention to. What such an explanation suggests is that we have paid entirely too little attention to what might be called the engineering aspects of program development: to developing training techniques, to providing technical assistance, and to providing materials that can be comprehended and used by the kinds of persons normally involved with program operation. We have paid too little attention to the types of people to be recruited to carry out a program activity and to the means by which one can install new curricula or methods into any functioning local system, such as the educational system. However pessimistic one might be about the efficacy of intervention programs, it is certainly true that no program, save perhaps a few of the scientific curricula programs, have involved extensive program development activities.

What I am proposing is a new style of development activity which would have a much longer time frame than we have used over the past five to eight years.

It would begin with a set of ideas which might be derived from exploratory and basic research, exemplary research and demonstration projects already in existence, or some form of program analysis. If a major effort to develop a new program or set of programs is desired, this research analysis material would be pulled together and a series of alternative program designs posited. Initially these designs, which would be fairly crude, would serve as a starting point for real program development activities. These activities might take between one and two years to accomplish and probably would proceed through a quasi-experimental framework utilizing control and experimental subjects. The activities would focus partially on development of materials and techniques, but also upon the development of the staff training procedures, selection criteria for staff, and strategies for intervention in local institutions if necessary. These techniques would be tested and refined in the second or pilot demonstration phase of this process.

Phase II would also be cast in an experimental framework, this time with alternative program designs being compared with one another. However, it would be expected that these projects would be highly developmental in nature with much experimenting with mechanisms for training and dissemination of program models, and with a highly skilled staff probably composed largely of people from the program developers own staff. The experimental framework would provide some discipline to the process and also allow a comparison in the pilot phase of program models with one another. At the end of Phase II

the mechanism intended to insure appropriate replications would be ready and the replication phase (Phase III) would begin.

The replication phase might involve as many as four to six replications of each program model so that if there were, for example, four alternative program models, one might expect between 12 and 16 sites to be involved. The programs would be carried on over a long enough period of time that start-up problems would be taken care of. The experimental research design should be a good one, using random assignment of subjects. Participants in the process should be the kinds of people who would normally be hired at the local levels. The sponsors should be typical of those normally expected to sponsor such programs if the programs were initiated normally. The involvement of the program developers in the activities of the local project should be only those that would be appropriate to the replication process (as designed in the earlier phase). In other words, program developers should not be extensively involved unless such involvement is part of the replication design (and expected to be part of any larger program activity). The intent of the replication phase is to get as close to a typical operational program using the program designs as little as is humanly possible. The evaluation might well, however, involve members of the program developers' staff in a process evaluation role so they can see the degree to which the intent of the program design is being followed in the operations.

The key feature of this process is that the experiment is run with truly replicated models instead of the type of "hot-house"

innovative models that might normally be expected in experiments as we have run them in the past. The process of replication should reflect that which is anticipated to be used in a national program or in support of local program operations if a national program is not contemplated. For example, if a dissemination is anticipated to be only in terms of written and other media, then that should be the manner in which the programs are initiated. If, on the other hand training institutes, technical assistance, or other forms of outside assistance are contemplated, they would be used in the replication activities.

This concept of program development requires some capabilities that do not readily exist either in the government or in the private sector. There are very few research organizations currently involved in program development that have the kind of staffs that would permit the extensive development of the programs and materials needed for the dissemination activities required here. The kinds of people required is substantially different than the research specialists who normally are involved in these activities and which the universities, for example, seek to attract. It is possible that some of these competences are available in private sector firms that have specialized in management training activities. That is something yet to be seen.

Within the government there is a need to develop the capacity to carry on lengthy program efforts. Continuity of sorts is required over a five to seven year period. Since this is not the sort of

continuity that has been widely available in the creative parts of the Federal structure, considerable attention should be paid to this problem.

There is also a need for a kind of long range planning. The style of replication effort which is to be a part of the first two phases of this process will depend very much upon the projections as to how the program materials will ultimately be used. If we go to the highly decentralized type of social program decisionmaking implicit in revenue sharing, the replication effort that is used should be appropriate for such a system. Prior to initiating any program development, attention should be given to this problem so that Phases I and II are properly constrained.